Introduction

• A person’s capacity to make personal/financial decisions is an important component of independence.
• As the senior population increases, so does the incidence of dementia, and with it, greater numbers of individuals who will experience a decline in decision-making capacity.
• Due to longstanding relationships and familiarity with patients, family physicians (FPs) are well-positioned to determine medical stability, conduct Decision-Making Capacity Assessments (DMCAs), and formulate opinions.
• While assessment of DMC is inherent in medical practice, there is no evidence that FPs feel confident to assess DMC

Study Objective

• To examine the training needs of FPs regarding DMCAs and ways in which training materials, based on a DMCA Model, might be adapted for use by FPs.

Methods

• Design
  o A scoping review of the literature
  o Qualitative research methodology: Focus groups and structured interviews
• Setting: FPs practicing in Primary Care, Day Programs, Home Living, Supportive/Assisted Living, Long Term Care, Restorative Care, Geriatric Clinics, and Geriatric Inpatient/Rehabilitation Units in the Edmonton Zone, Alberta.
• Participants: FPs self-selected
• Procedure:
  o A scoping review of the literature to examine the current status of physician education regarding DMCAs
  o A focus group and interviews with FPs to ascertain their educational needs in this area.

Results

• 4 main themes emerged in the scoping review:
  o Increasing saliency of DMCAs due to an aging population
  o Sub-optimal DMCA training for physicians
  o Inconsistent approaches to DMCA
  o Tensions between autonomy and protection
• The findings of the focus groups and interviews indicate that, while FPs working as independent practitioners or on inter-professional (IP) teams are motivated to engage in DMCAs and utilize the DMCA Model for those assessments, several factors impede them from conducting DMCAs, notably:
  o A lack of education
  o Isolation from IP teams
  o Uneasiness around managing conflict with families
  o Fear of liability
  o Concerns regarding remuneration.

Discussion

• Population aging and increases in the number of individuals with dementia will result in an increase in the demand for DMCAs.
• Aligned with the scoping review, participants in the focus groups and interviews agreed that education and training is critical for enabling them to effectively and confidently conduct DMCAs.
• It is clear that there is no consistent approach to conducting DMCAs.

Conclusion

This research project has helped to inform ways to better train and support FPs conducting DMCAs. FPs are well-positioned, with proper training, to effectively conduct DMCAs. To engage in the process, however, the barriers should be addressed.